



EPISODE 2x19: “Miranda”

Written by Katie Fiorino & Matt Engstrom

Directed by Matt Engstrom

Plot, scenes & text from the Shooting Script, and Original Draft of the
“Serenity” Motion Picture by Joss Whedon

WARNING: *This episode contains graphic scenes with violence that may offend some.*

www.stillflying.net

Head Writer & Executive Producer: George W. Krubski

Producers: Matt Engstrom & David Elmer

Art Director: Sean Young

Casting Director: Katie Fiorino

Disclaimer: The crew of the Serenity, the Verse in which they live, and their fellow inhabitants are the property of Joss Whedon, Universal Studios, and/or Fox Television. They are used in this work of fan fiction with love and respect, but without permission.

Teaser

EXT. SERENITY – DAY

The ship sits on the ground, filling the frame.

MAL, ZOE, and JAYNE stand near the airlock in full spacesuits and armed. Zoe reads a handheld SCANNER. Mal and Jayne look around, on edge.

Zoe takes a few steps away, eyes on the scanner. Jayne takes a little experimental jump.

JAYNE

Grav's normal.

ZOE

Oh-two levels check, pressure... If there's anything wrong, the scanner ain't reading it.

Mal pulls off his helmet. Breathes, looking around him.

MAL

Well, somethin' sure as hell ain't right.

SLOPPY ZOOM OUT - WIDER ANGLE: Serenity is parked in the middle of a CITY.

ZOOM OUT FURTHER TO –

EXT. MIRANDA – DAY – ESTABLISHING

Not as big as Sihnon, but less rustic than anything else we've seen. Gleaming metal, spread out for miles in every direction.

Small portions have been decimated by fires or explosions long since cold, others are overgrown with weeds, but most of the city is intact.

Silent, as if trapped in amber.

EXT. MIRANDA – NEAR SERENITY – MOMENTS LATER

Mal, Zoe, and Jayne have been joined by the others. SIMON has his arm around RIVER, who stands as if listening to something no one else hears. WASH helps Zoe out of the upper part of the spacesuit. INARA and BEN HICKS loiter nearby, looking around at the empty LANDING PAD.

Mal struggles to shuck out of his spacesuit. Jayne shows no signs of removing his.

The pedestrian footpath leading out from the landing pad is topped by an archway that reads "WELCOME TO MIRANDA – UTOPIA ON THE RIM." The electronic message sign changes, bleeding into the BLUE SUN LOGO and a larger, stylized BIRD flying against a beautiful sunset. Right of the flying bird, "BROUGHT TO YOU BY BLUE SUN" appears. The message sign loop begins again.

KAYLEE stares up at the welcome banner, arms wrapped protectively around herself.

Heavy silence. Then:

MAL
(too loud)
Mule prepped?

Most everyone startles at the sudden words.

Kaylee nods. Silence again, broken only by the scuff of listless feet. Wash drapes Zoe's suit over Ben's waiting arms.

MAL (cont'd)
(to Wash, struggling a bit with his suit)
Ten more cities like this one, huh?

WASH
At least. Maybe a dozen.

MAL
All of 'em just as quiet?

WASH
The beacon – or whatever it is – makes this one downright noisy in comparison.

MAL
There should be thousands—

INARA
Millions.

They look at her now.

INARA (cont'd)
If Wash is right, and there are a dozen cities this size,
Miranda should have a population of millions.

JAYNE (via suit's speaker)

Then where the hell is everybody? Who builds a gorram planet and don't stick nobody on it?

BEN

Could be they did, then somebody else come and took 'em away.

(nervous glance at the sky)

Reavers.

JAYNE (via suit's speaker)

Boy's prob'ly right. Gorram Reavers. Had a whole planet of smorgasbord an' now we're the only vittles in the place.

MAL

Could be that's true. In which case we should stop crowin' and start lookin' to figure things out.

WASH

But before we do...

(to Jayne)

Why are you still in your suit?!? You look like an idiot.

Jayne grins and taps his helmet.

JAYNE

I ain't gonna look so dumb when y'all keel over dead from some outer rim space-virus an' I'm the last one standin'.

SIMON

I thought you said it was Reavers. Now it's a "space virus"?

Mal walks over to them, now free of his suit. On his way, he piles it on top of Zoe's suit in Ben's arms.

MAL

Air's fine, Jayne. 'Cept for the smell.

WASH

Smells good to me. Blue Sun air processor freshness.

SIMON

(thoughtful)

It smells like home.

INARA

(nodding)

It smells like a Core world.

MAL
See? You're fine.

He smacks a button on Jayne's spacesuit—

JAYNE (via suit's speaker)
No! Wait!

But it's too late. Air hisses as the helmet unlocks. Jayne looks stricken as Mal turns away, toward River.

MAL
We come all this way lookin' for answers, little albatross.
I ain't too puffed up to admit I don't have a notion of
where we should start. You got any thoughts?

In the background, Jayne takes his helmet off and takes a big experimental sniff.

RIVER
It isn't what we thought.

MAL
Well, that's what I'm say—

RIVER
The environment's stable...

River walks away, back toward Serenity.

RIVER (cont'd)
(to herself)
No war. Peace. Pax. *Hé ping. Ekawa.* Rest in peace.

JAYNE
Her environment don't seem too stable.

Jayne tosses his helmet at Ben, who barely catches it, and struggles a little under the pile of spacesuit parts. Simon watches River go, then turns to find Mal looking at him expectantly.

SIMON
She's fine. She's calm.

MAL
You gave her a dose of that new juice?

SIMON
Delcium? No.

MAL
No?

SIMON
She refused.

MAL
Ain't no refusin' orders, son. I need a River can give me
straight answers.

Now we're BACK WITH RIVER, staying on her face as she walks toward Serenity and away from the crew. Behind her, Mal and Simon continue to argue, their voices fading as they get blurry in the background. Most of the others cluster around them, but Jayne shares a "These people are insane" look with Ben.

MAL (cont'd, OS)
She wants to come along, she needs to—

SIMON (OS)
She needs to be herself.

MAL (OS)
Thought the green juice made her more herself.

As River reaches the RAMP to Serenity, the world around her goes SILENT and WHITE.

She looks around, confused but serene.

WOMAN'S VOICE (OS)
It isn't what we thought...

River is startled – is someone there? She peers into the CARGO HOLD. Empty. Quiet, but for the hum of the idling HOVER-MULE. BOOK and their friends from Haven lay dead on the floor.

She turns back to look at Simon and Mal, still arguing. Others have joined in.

Then the arguing suddenly stops. They all turn to face her at the same time.

They LIE DOWN: Kaylee on her side like a child, Wash and Zoe lifelessly beside each other, Jayne with his gun loosely in his hands. Simon, arms at his sides, eyes staring blankly upwards. None of them close their eyes.

Then it's like a timewarp, or time lapse photography: The world stays still while their bodies ROT, decompose, bodies stiffening, skin shriveling, bones turning into ash...

River lets out a gasp.

EXT. MIRANDA – NEAR SERENITY – DAY

We're back with the crew, and everyone is yelling at once.

MAL
—last time, she ain't—

SIMON
—need her to feel everything—

WASH
—should track the beacon—

KAYLEE
—where did everyone—

INARA
—would you two just—

BEN
—this stuff is heavy—

JAYNE
—gonna be et by Reavers—

They are all cut off by the WHINE of an engine.


BOOM!

The hover-mule—piloted by River in her goggles—bursts out of the cargo hold, sails down the ramp at top speed.

Mal has to DIVE out of the way as it careens over the spot where he was standing.

MAL
Gorram—

The hover-mule zips past Jayne, out a little from the rest of the group, and zips toward the city, disappearing under the “WELCOME TO MIRANDA” archway.



Act One

EXT. MIRANDA – NEAR SERENITY – CONTINUOUS

Everyone looks on in the direction the mule went – shocked, unable to process what just happened. Everyone except Simon.

SIMON
River! No!

He runs after her immediately. This quickly gets Mal out of his daze.

MAL
(all business)
Jayne.

Jayne swings out an arm, casually clotheslining Simon, who tumbles to the ground in a heap.

Kaylee gasps in shock. Mal marches forward, Zoe at his heels.

Simon's on his knees, looking to the path beneath the welcome sign as the mule disappears from sight. The whine of the engine fades into the distance.

SIMON

River...

Simon looks up at Jayne, who smiles down at him.

JAYNE

Less you got some fairy dust in your doctor bag, runnin' after that mule on foot ain't gonna catch you nothin' but bloody toes.

Simon stands up, riled.

MAL

Doctor—

Simon lunges at Jayne—

SIMON

You son of a—

—but Mal steps in the way, grabbing Simon hard.

MAL

SIMON!

INARA

Mal! You—

Zoe quiets her with a touch on the arm.

Simon shakes off Mal's grip. The mule's engine can barely be heard in the distance.

SIMON

(angry, panicked)

River— River, she—

MAL

Stole my mule, and is now heading devil-knows-where?
Yeah, I saw.

SIMON
You're blaming me for this?

MAL
I believe I am.

INARA
Does that even matter now? Assigning blame won't—

SIMON
(still at Mal)
<Of all the lice to bite my ass>! This place is all we've got left, Captain, and she led us here! My crazy psychic sister!

JAYNE
Smartest thing I heard come out your mouth yet, doc.

SIMON
(ignoring Jayne)
And she didn't have one drop of that stuff running through her bloodstream when she did! That's the River we need right now!

MAL
And she's gone.

KAYLEE
So let's get her back, Cap'n. Simon's right. We need her.

ZOE
Got a crew member gone astray, sir. That's all that matters right now.

Mal thinks for a moment. Ben lets out a pained grunt, struggling to hold the three spacesuits.

MAL
(all business)
Okay. Wash, Ben – Head back to the bridge, see if you can track her somehow.

WASH
Righty-oh.

BEN
Thank Buddha.

And they're off, Ben struggling to carry his load.

MAL

Kaylee, Inara – This could be a long hike. We need water, rations. The basics.

INARA

I can prep the shuttle—

MAL

No shuttle.

Simon looks at Mal, spoiling for a fight again.

SIMON

Why not? It's the fastest—

ZOE

Reavers.

Jayne smiles at Zoe, then looks up into the sky and nods, as if vindicated.

ZOE (cont'd)

Reavers might see it.

SIMON

And they wouldn't see the mule?

MAL

Not from orbit. Shuttle's bigger, faster, hotter engine trail. Flies over the buildings. Kinda hard to miss.

Simon backs down a little. Mal turns to Zoe and Jayne.

MAL

I want you two to load up on ammo.

JAYNE

I ain't comin'.

Mal grimaces. Kaylee is stunned. Simon looks disgusted.

MAL

We need you, Jayne.

JAYNE

What you need is me back at the ship, in case the Reavers come. 'member Lilac? Last time we run 'em, Serenity come and saved our sweet <asses>!

MAL

Good point. But I ain't leaving you alone with my boat.

JAYNE

C'mon, Mal! I won't run!

KAYLEE

Ain't nowhere to run now, anyways, 'cept forward.

ZOE

(to Mal)

I'll talk to Wash and Ben.

MAL

(nods)

Then check the ammo, make sure you're loaded up. I want survival gear, compasses, anything that might be of use.

She takes off toward Serenity, motioning for the others to follow. Inara and Kaylee go with her, and Jayne sulks behind like a petulant child.

It's just Mal and Simon now.

For a moment they stand in the utter silence of Miranda eyeing each other.

MAL (cont'd)

You should have been watching her.

SIMON

I thought—

MAL

No, you didn't.

SIMON

We've kept her sleeping, Captain. Sedated. Chained up like an animal—

MAL

To stop somethin' exactly like this from happenin'. Ain't been pretty to see. Ain't been fair. But it kept her alive. But hey, you thought—

Simon clenches his fist.

Mal sees it. He hooks his thumbs in his belt loops, standing at ease.

MAL

Do what you need to do, son. Won't change nothin'.

Simon turns around and stalks off back to the ship, leaving Mal alone.

Mal sighs and looks out at the empty city.

EXT. MIRANDA – STREET – SAME TIME

It's a simple boulevard, lined on either side with tall, glass-front buildings.

Silent. Still. Abandoned.

Then:

WOOSH! The mule zips through the street.

River pilots the mule, eyes wide.

WOMAN'S VOICE (VO)

The people here stopped fighting...

FLASHCUT: The boulevard is alive - full of people going about their business.

The mule stops. River looks around the empty street.

FLASHCUT: The people lining the sidewalks look familiar. They are the people of Haven. Their friends. MILLIE. BERNABE. DEREK. HIROKU. SHEPHERD BOOK. They all suddenly stop and turn en-masse to look at River. Accusatory.

WOMAN'S VOICE (VO)

And then they stopped everything else...

RIVER

No. Please...

FLASHCUT: Their accusatory stares go blank, lifeless, and they all lie down.

RIVER

No. No! Get up!

But she's alone again. Her hands shake as she restarts the mule.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Ben fiddles with controls in the co-pilot's seat. Wash looks over Ben's shoulder at the screen.

WASH

You gonna be okay back here?

BEN

You gonna be okay out there?

WASH

Look, this place is way too creepy for me to stay here, all alone and away from my wife.

BEN

Afraid that without Zoe to take care of you, you'll—

WASH

(pointing)

Wait. What's that? Go back.

Ben nods and fiddles some more.

BEN

Where is she going?

CLOSE-IN on a screen showing a small, green dot moving through a grid.

WASH

Besides crazy? I'm not sure she knows any better than we do.

He continues to watch the screen.

WASH (cont'd)

Actually, it looks kinda like she's heading towards... the beacon.

BEN

Huh. I know she's... well, she seems to have a way of knowing things, but unless she has a transceiver implanted in her brain...

WASH

(dead serious)

It's possible. You'd have to ask Simon.

Ben looks at him, stunned.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

Simon sits on a crate, looking overwhelmed. Across the bay, Inara packs rations and other equipment into bags, while Jayne checks an ammo bandolier.

Kaylee joins Simon, leaning against his crate.

KAYLEE

Hey.

Simon doesn't acknowledge her.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

It's gonna be okay.

Still no response. She hops up on the crate next to him.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

I know it don't seem like it now, but... it's gonna be okay, Simon. We got through too much, come too far... It's gonna be okay.

She smiles at him, but he's not even looking. Her smile falters. She reaches out to wrap her arm around his shoulders—

SIMON

Kaylee—

He jumps up, almost recoiling from her touch. Kaylee looks shocked and hurt.

SIMON

I just— Not now.

Simon walks away, past Jayne, who snorts a laugh at him.

JAYNE

(under his breath)
Smooth move, dumbass.

INT. SERENITY – STORAGE LOCKER

Mal and Zoe ready their weapons, working side-by-side, in comfortable, practiced silence.

ZOE

You shouldn't have been so rough with 'im, sir.

Mal stops, turns to Zoe. She keeps working.

MAL

He's losing his focus. Ain't but a two-step from panic.

ZOE

Simon isn't a soldier. None of them are. Even Jayne.

MAL

Well, they got about five minutes to graduate boot camp.

Zoe loads her mare's leg, still not looking up.

Mal sighs, shakes his head. He grabs a box of small ammo, opens it.

MAL (cont'd)

How are they?

Zoe stops. She's finished.

ZOE

Look them in the eyes, sir. You'll see right fast how they are.

She turns around and leaves.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY

Simon's in the middle of packing his MEDKIT when Inara comes in, holding a dented old THERMOS.

SIMON

If you're here to lecture me about how I treated Kaylee, I don't have—

She pops the cap off and fills it with steaming tea. She hands him the cup.

INARA

A small indulgence amidst the rations. I didn't have time to brew it properly...

SIMON (cont'd)

I— Thank you.

They smile wearily at each other. Old friends. He takes a sip of the tea.

INARA

You aren't alone, Simon.

SIMON
I... I know. It's just...

Another sip of tea. He looks around the infirmary, not making eye contact with Inara.

SIMON (cont'd)
River is... She's all I have and, I... I should have known. I mean, if the Academy offered such brilliant programs you'd think we'd have heard of it. I should have known that something was wrong, that something...
(shakes his head, shaking it off)
We've come all this way, and it feels like I've been running in circles this whole time. This place feels like I'm back in the Central planets, still as confused as ever.

Simon takes another sip and looks down at the cup of tea in his hands.



SIMON (cont'd)
This is good. Your best, probably.
(beat)
I'm not sure I'd recognize the man I used to be if he came up and said hello. Truth is, I wouldn't want to know him. Weak tea in a beautiful cup.

INARA
Simon...

He puts the tea down.

SIMON

I've done all I could for my sister. You've all done all you could, and more. And now we're here, at the end of the 'verse.

(beat)

I need to find her, Inara. I need to know if she finds some peace.

He takes another deep breath. Inara takes his hand. She looks like she might say something, but—

MAL (OS)

All right, people—

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – SAME TIME

MAL (cont'd)

—let's move!

Mal, armed to the teeth, comes down the cargo bay stairs, joining Zoe, Wash, and Jayne. Ben's up on the balcony near the foredeck hall.

WASH

(calling up to Ben)

You've got the bridge. If the worst happens, don't hit any switches if you're not sure what they do. Com me and I'll talk you through. And if I'm not sure, then we're humped.

BEN

I'll track the mule. Tell you where the wind blows her.

Kaylee's standing by a pile of BACKPACKS, slipping one on. Wash, carrying a HANDHELD SCANNER, shoulders the second one. Inara walks over and grabs the last pack.

Simon joins the group, medkit in hand. His eyes lock with Mal's.

SIMON

All right, let's go.

The group moves out, through the AIRLOCK DOOR, only Wash taking a moment to offer a quick wave up to Ben.

BEN

Okay then, I guess I'll see you guys—

The airlock door closes behind them.

BEN (cont'd)

...later.

Ben looks down at the silent cargo hold, and the dead bodies lined neatly across the floor.

BEN (cont'd)

I hope I see you later...

Act Two

EXT. MIRANDA – INTERSECTION – LATER

Two major thoroughfares, both silent, intersect in the empty city.

We hear the crew before we see them: the SCUFFLING of quiet feet on the ground.

Zoe is the first to come into view, moving with military precision, eyes constantly sweeping ahead and to the sides. Her steps are silent.

Mal follows a few yards behind her, and the rest of the crew comes along nervously and noisily: Wash, Simon, Inara and Kaylee. Jayne brings up the rear, constantly looking over his shoulder.

At the intersection, Zoe turns around, looks at Wash. Wash consults the scanner, then looks up again. He shakes his head and shrugs.

Zoe makes a face at her husband. Not happy.

Mal trots back to Wash. The two of them look at the scanner, puzzled.

MAL

Get Ben on the horn. We need a bearing.

Wash pulls out the com unit and moves off to the side with Mal as the others wait.

Kaylee approaches Simon.

KAYLEE

I think maybe.... I think I know this place.

That gets his attention.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

Back when I was maybe ten years old, things wasn't goin' so well for my poppa. He talked about maybe gettin' off-planet, startin' somewhere fresh where they had lots of work.

She points to a SIGN over an empty NEWSPAPER KIOSK at the corner of the intersection. It's one of the UTOPIA ON THE RIM signs, with the stylized bird flying against the sunset.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

He had some brochures.

Simon stares at her, unimpressed.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

I... remember the bird... only it didn't move.

SIMON

That doesn't give us any answers.

Kaylee deflates.

WASH (OS)

Got it Ben. Thanks.

Wash looks at the scanner again, then looks at Zoe and points forward, across the intersection.

Zoe nods and moves forward. Mal heads up to join her.

As the group gets underway again, Simon darts ahead, separating from Kaylee. Kaylee struggles a bit under the weight of her pack.

Jayne catches up to her, casually plucks the bag from her and shoulders it. She falls into step beside him as the group continues walking.

JAYNE

We shouldn't be here.

KAYLEE

Look around! Somethin' happened here, and... and everyone we know's paid the price for it.

JAYNE

You think I don't know that? We stay too long here, an' we're gonna get ourselves kilt too, Kaylee. Out here. Edge of nowhere. Chasin' a girl who chases shadows. It... don't mean nothin'.

Kaylee looks at Jayne with a mixture of pity and disappointment, then quickens her step to join Inara.

JAYNE (cont'd)
(to himself, watching Kaylee walk away)
An' I don't want to see you get kilt, neither.

EXT. MIRANDA DRY-DOCKS – MULE – SAME TIME

The mule chugs past a large PORT AREA. Grounded SPACESHIPS of all sizes and shapes line the dry-docks, some nothing but husks, stripped and scavenged clean. Empty.

CLOSE ON: River's face. Eyes watching the silent, empty world pass by.

WOMAN'S VOICE (VO)
There's thirty million people here...

She looks out into the emptiness: shops, fueling stations, empty hover vehicles, the stripped ships beyond. Where the steel and concrete of the city breaks up, it is overgrown with trees and weeds.

WOMAN'S VOICE (VO)
Most starved...

FLASHCUT: SHAPES lay amidst the weeds, with clouds of FLIES hovering above them.

River blinks the vision away and looks closer, focusing on the shops, the sidewalks, the weeds growing between the trees. The vision does not fade. SHAPES lay in the weeds, clouds of FLIES hovering above them. These BODIES are real.

The SOUND of the swarming flies increases until—

ZOE (VO)
Ho!

EXT. MIRANDA STREETS – SAME TIME

Zoe stands over a BODY—little more than a skeleton covered with some remnants of skin and tattered clothes—which lies face down on the ground. Nearby, a stalled HOVER-CAR sits at the side of the road, the first vehicle the crew has seen since starting out.

Zoe examines the corpse as Mal approaches. The others catch up but keep their distance.

ZOE

No entry wounds, no fractures...

MAL

Poison?

Simon approaches the skeleton, hunkering down and quickly examining it.

SIMON

There's no discoloration, and she's not doubled over or showing signs of pain...

Wash eyes things from a distance.

WASH

You can tell it's a she?

(to Inara)

I guess he is a good doctor.

MAL

(to Simon)

There's gases that kill painless, right?

JAYNE (OS)

Got more!

Off to the side, Jayne stands by the stalled hover-car. Kaylee hugs herself.

Inside are the skeletons of three people: two adults and a small child strapped in the back. Clothes in better condition than Zoe's skeleton. Again, no sign of violence.

JAYNE

They're all just sittin'. Didn't crash...

Everyone looks to each other asking the same question:

MAL

What the hell happened here?

KAYLEE

Why aren't they--? I mean, who would leave 'em here like this?

WASH

We would. We already did.

Zoe shoots him a look.

MAL

We didn't have the time for grave diggin', and neither did they. Keep movin', and maybe we'll find out why.

Jayne runs his finger across the windshield, drawing a line in the dust.

JAYNE

Key's still in the ignition.

SIMON

Start it up, Jayne.

Simon walks toward the hover-car.

JAYNE

Since when you start givin' orders?

SIMON

Just—

MAL

Do it, Jayne.

Jayne turns, looks at Mal. Mal nods impatiently. Jayne immediately obeys, opening the door and turning the key. The hover-car, after a few sputters, hums to life. Jayne backs up, smiling.

MAL

I'll take the hover-car. I'll find River. Rest of you, keep after the beacon.

SIMON

I'm going with you.

Mal looks at Simon's determination. Not a fight worth fighting. He nods.

Simon pushes past Jayne, opens the hover car door and begins to pull the bodies out of both the front and back seats, piling them on the pavement outside. Jayne watches, impressed. Simon takes his seat in front, on the passenger side.

MAL

Okay, then. Me an' the doc'll go—

KAYLEE

And me.

MAL

Kaylee, now—

KAYLEE

Engine sounds okay now, but she's coughin' a little two, maybe three times a minute. Might need me.

Just then the engine coughs again, sputters, but keeps running. Kaylee skirts carefully around the bodies—very studiously NOT looking at them—and gets into the backseat.

MAL

Right. Zoe, you lead the rest—

Jayne jumps in the back next to Kaylee.

MAL

Oh, for the love of—! Where you think you're goin'?!?

JAYNE

With you.

SIMON

You've never cared about River's safety before.

JAYNE

I—

(looks at Kaylee, then back)

I ain't gettin' left.

MAL

I ain't splittin' up my crew. Get the hell—

ZOE

We'll be fine on foot, sir. You'll be more visible, and could maybe use the extra gun-hand. You find River, and we'll find the beacon.

Mal, speechless, gives up and walks toward the hover car.

WASH

Mal!

MAL

What now?

Wash throws Mal the com unit. Mal catches it.

WASH

You get lost, Ben'll point you in the right direction.

Mal gives Wash a nod of thanks, then walks to the hover-car and climbs in behind the wheel. After he shuts the door, Inara steps up to the window. Mal rolls it down, exasperated. The delays are getting ludicrous.

MAL

What do you want? Ain't got room for no more in here.

INARA

I've been very quiet.

MAL

It's a color that suits you. You should stick with it.

INARA

Mal...

MAL

Can't handle a lecture right now.

INARA

Mal, I— Be careful.

Not what he expected.

MAL

Here.

He bends down, takes a gun out of a holster by his ankle and hands it to her. She accepts without hesitation.

MAL (cont'd)

Safety catch is on the left. It kicks a little, so be sure to grip it with both hands and lock your elbows-

INARA

I'll be careful, Mal. Now go.

Mal looks her in the eyes. Scans the empty sky above. Looks first to Zoe outside the window, then to Simon at his side. He nods.

The hover-car chugs away, leaving Zoe, Wash, and Inara standing there.

EXT. MIRANDA – STREETS – LATER

River drives the hover-mule forward, scanning the empty streets.

She's startled by a loud metallic BANG behind her. She whips her head around.

Nothing.

Still driving, she inspects the controls. Nothing wrong. She tilts her head, as if listening to the engine...

WOMAN'S VOICE (VO)

I have to be quick...

River turns back around—

To see that a SANDY-HAIRED WOMAN, her hair pulled back in a ponytail, sits in the mule next to her. She wears a blue uniform. She doesn't look at River, but forward, toward the horizon.

SANDY-HAIRED WOMAN (cont'd)

We can't leave...

INT. HOVER-CAR – SAME TIME

Kaylee, looks through the rear window in the backseat until Inara, Wash, and Zoe pass out of sight behind them. She's squeezed in with Jayne, who has his window rolled down and alternates between fidgeting with his gun and poking his head out to look up into the sky. Mal and Simon, sullen and silent, sit in the front.

KAYLEE

Mule's been runnin' slow since Lilac. I'm sure we'll catch up to River any minute now...

The others ignore her. Simon cranes his neck to see something, but relaxes in his seat again.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

Engine sounds good. Sounds like it's warming up to us after all these years. Shouldn't give us no trouble.

Jayne huffs, looking out the window into the sky.

Kaylee looks out her window. The large dry-docks that River passed earlier, with their hollowed out ships stripped clean, comes into view.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

Would ya look at that. 's'like a graveyard...

The others look briefly at the grounded ships as they pass, then return to their tasks.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

That looks like three Qilins over there, hardly a scratch on the hulls. No weapons, neither. Hardly ever see that. I thought they was all conscripted for the war.

SIMON

(looking around)

They look pretty stripped down. Maybe this place was military re-supply.

Jayne continues to search the sky.

MAL

I ain't never heard of a planet called Miranda. Think I would if they were fightin' on my side.

SIMON

(distracted, taking it all in)

Maybe they weren't on your side. This whole place feels like a Core city.

KAYLEE

On the outer edge of the rim? Past Reaver territory?

SIMON

I wouldn't say past so much as in the middle...

JAYNE

Poor <bastards> all got raped and et!

SIMON

(turns around)

The whole planet? Millions of people? How hungry do you think the Reavers are?

JAYNE

Well, where else did all the folks go? In their stomachs, is where!

MAL

It don't make sense. None of this does.

No one disagrees.

BEN (via com)

Captain. We've got trouble.

Jayne and Kaylee share a look, and both lean forward to look out the windshield.

EXT. MIRANDA STREETS – MULE – SAME TIME

River looks at the sandy-haired woman sitting next to her. The streetscape roars by unnoticed. If anything, River is accelerating.

SANDY-HAIRED WOMAN

There are people... they aren't people...

(she turns to look at River)

They've killed most of us...

River looks away. Forward again. Her eyes widen and she grips the wheel hard.

The mule slams into the back of a stalled hover-car, tearing through it and bouncing off.

She struggles to regain control as the mule slams into another car, and another, finally bringing the mule to a sudden halt. River tumbles from the mule, rolling across the pavement and coming to rest.

The mule's engines sputter and die.

Silence.

SANDY-HAIRED WOMAN (OS, cont'd)


Not just killed...

The sound of ENGINES—rough, brutal, almost primal—rises. River opens her eyes, looking up at the sandy-haired woman, now standing over her.

SANDY-HAIRED WOMAN (cont'd)

They've done... things...

The large shape of a REAVER SHIP passes overhead.



Act Three

INT. HOVER-CAR – DAY

Suddenly, Jayne goes from fidgeting to plain freaking out.

JAYNE

Gorram mother-ruttin'— I told you! I told you!

In the sky out the windshield, there's a spot in the clouds much more metallic than it should be, and growing larger by the second: the Reaver ship.

JAYNE (cont'd)
We're gonna get et.

MAL
We ain't getting nothin'.

JAYNE
Stop! Stop the gorram car, they'll see us!

SIMON
Keep going, Captain!

JAYNE
They'll see us!

SIMON
If they see us, they'll see River too!

KAYLEE
Cap'n!

The hover-car comes to a sudden sputtering halt. Mal doesn't even turn around.

MAL
Get out.

Jayne doesn't need telling twice. He's out the door in less than a second, weapon up and targeting the Reaver ship as it flies closer. Kaylee hesitates.

KAYLEE
You're not coming?!

SIMON
Kaylee...

Jayne opens her door and reaches in, grabbing Kaylee's arm. Kaylee struggles against him.

SIMON
You have to keep out of sight.

KAYLEE
You do too, Simon!

SIMON

We'll be careful. I need to find her, Kaylee. I need to know she's safe. But I need to know you're okay, too. Please.

(to Jayne)

Jayne—

JAYNE

Don't even need to say it, Doc. They won't touch her.

She yields to Jayne's tug and slips out of the car. Mal and Simon drive away.

EXT. MIRANDA – STREETS – SAME TIME

Zoe, Wash and Inara stand in the middle of the street, looking up at the distant shape of the Reaver ship.

INARA

What do we do?

Zoe waves them to the side of the street, seeking cover along the store-fronts.

WASH

Okay, now what, lambie-toes?

ZOE

We follow orders.

Wash and Inara trade a glance.

ZOE (cont'd)

We find the beacon.

WASH

Or, we head back to Serenity.

ZOE

Captain wouldn't say head back to the ship, he'd say head for the beacon.

(beat)

It's all we've got left.

INARA

(quietly)

<Buddha, hear my prayer>...

WASH

I think this might be one of those times when the Captain is wrong.

ZOE

We're just as exposed heading back as moving forward.

WASH

Speaking of exposed, shouldn't we hide? There are plenty of empty places in this ghost town.

ZOE

We keep movin' forward. There's only one ship. We stay out of sight. We find the—

The SOUND is horrible. It's like something ripped from the throat of a rabid, dying ram. Inara and Wash recoil, backing closer into the building wall before they realize it's a HORN, coming from the Reaver ship and echoing across the empty city.

They all look at each other—

The growling horn sounds again.

ZOE

Let's move.

She marches forward and the others follow, caught in her wake.

EXT. MIRANDA – DRY-DOCKS – SAME TIME

The horn sounds here, much louder, because of the proximity to the ship.

At the outskirts of the dry-docks sits a small gray GUARDHOUSE, little bigger than a tollbooth. The bar to allow entrance is permanently raised.

INT. MIRANDA – DRY-DOCKS – GUARDHOUSE – SAME TIME

The growling horn echoes to silence, the sound bleeding into the sound of the Reaver ship's ENGINES.

Kaylee and Jayne are crammed in the guardhouse, Kaylee hiding behind Jayne as he cautiously pokes Vera out the window, keeping it trained on the approaching ship.

KAYLEE

What was that?

JAYNE
Don't know. Don't care to.

KAYLEE
We should go.

JAYNE
Stay put. It's comin' closer. This place's as good as any.

Kaylee holds onto Jayne's arm. Jayne backs away from the window as far as he can while still keeping his eye on the Reaver ship.

He watches as the Reaver ship passes slowly over the dry-docks. Cables wrapped around the hull suddenly release and it drops—

CORPSES.

A dozen. Maybe more. They fall like rain on the docks, most landing between the ships, out of sight. Some, though, hit the ships and bounce sickeningly.

JAYNE
The hell're they doin'?

KAYLEE
(taking a peek)
What?

The horn growls low again as the last of the corpses fall to the earth beneath.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
(quietly)
Oh...

EXT. MIRANDA – ALLEYS – SAME TIME

The hover-car speeds through the parallel alleys and side streets, close to buildings, keeping out of sight.

INT. HOVER-CAR – SAME TIME

Mal and Simon keep their eyes on the Reaver ship, now behind them.

MAL
Don't know what that horn was, but it sounds like it's
landin' now.

SIMON

You don't think they spotted Jayne and Kaylee, do you?

MAL

(shakes his head)

They ain't on a hunt, that's plain to see. Their flight path weren't excitable. Almost seems...

(looks in the rear-view mirror)

Frightened. Careful.

SIMON

(looking back)

Reverent, almost. Like tiptoeing through a flower-bed.

MAL

Sure. If you wanna wax poetical.

Mal picks up the com unit.

MAL

You there Ben?

BEN (via com)

Good to hear your voice, Captain. Everyone okay?

MAL

Seems so. Where's my lost lamb now?

BEN (via com)

Due east of you. Mule's stopped on a main north-south thoroughfare. A highway or something. Either she found what she's looking for, or—

Simon looks up sharply.

MAL

(quickly)

Just let me know if she starts to roam.

Mal and Simon share a look.

EXT. MIRANDA – DRY-DOCKS/INT. GUARD HOUSE

The Reaver ship's engines run quieter as it idles, nestled amidst the grounded ships.

Jayne and Kaylee continue to watch. Jayne looks through the scope on Vera.

KAYLEE

They comin' closer?

CUT TO: Jayne's view through the scope. DARK FIGURES mill about, dragging a hose from the Reaver ship to a nearby grounded ship.

JAYNE (OS)

No. They're refueling. Suckin' off the teat of that big ship over there.

BACK TO: Jayne and Kaylee in the kiosk.

KAYLEE

They're on a supply run.

JAYNE

But why drop the bodies?

KAYLEE

'S like they're makin' an offerin' or somethin'. Givin' somethin' for what they take?

JAYNE

They're mindless monsters. Puttin' gold pieces in the offerin' plate don't make no sense. Makes 'em almost—

KAYLEE

Human.

EXT. MIRANDA – MULE CRASH SITE

River walks to the crashed mule, reaching into the cab and pulling free a PISTOL from its hidden holster. She looks back in the direction that she had come; behind, to where the Reaver ship landed.

The sandy-haired woman stands at her side. They share a frightened, sad look.

SNARLING GROWLS and SCUFFLING FEET approach, unseen. There are METALLIC BANGS, growing more frenzied and louder by the second.

River cocks the weapon in her hand.

INT. MIRANDA – DRY-DOCKS – GUARD HOUSE

There's a SCUFFLING NOISE outside the guardhouse door. Jayne immediately sweeps Kaylee behind him and swings his gun at the door as it opens—

—to reveal Wash and Inara. Wash is aiming a pistol into the guardhouse, with Inara behind him, Mal's hold-out gun awkwardly drawn.

Wash and Jayne stare at each other for a beat, then lower their weapons.

JAYNE
Gorrammit, Wash, I coulda—

WASH
(stage whisper)
Voice down. Because, hey, Reavers.

Jayne grimaces.

INARA
What are you doing here? Where's Mal?

They all squeeze into the guardhouse.

KAYLEE
Cap'n an' Simon still got the hover-car. They left us—

INARA
They left you?

KAYLEE
It ain't like that... Not really.

But she looks like she's not so sure.

INT. MIRANDA – HOVER CAR – SAME TIME

Mal and Simon drive across the empty highway. Simon suddenly points forward.

SIMON
There she is! River!

MAL
I see her.

Through the windshield, they see the crashed mule and other stalled vehicles, and River standing there amongst them, watching the hover-car approach.

Mal slows the vehicle to a cautious halt.

MAL (cont'd)
She's armed.

INT. MIRANDA – DRY-DOCKS – GUARD HOUSE – SAME TIME

Zoe quietly joins the group. She looks completely unsurprised to see Jayne and Kaylee.

ZOE
(to Wash)
Found a way around. Should have a straight run at the beacon.
(to Jayne)
Sit-rep?

JAYNE
Layin' low. Weren't spotted, neither were Mal and the Doc.

ZOE
(nods)
Let's keep it that way. We got a good bearing on the beacon.
(pointing out a path)
Keep low and out of sight, and keep movin'.

As the group moves out, Jayne and Kaylee take one last look in the direction of the Reaver ship.

EXT. MIRANDA – MULE CRASH SITE – SAME TIME

River and the sandy-haired woman stand there, watching the DARK FIGURES approach, accompanied by more loud, metallic BANGS.

At the same time, the sandy-haired woman and River speak:

RIVER
I won't live to report this...

SANDY-HAIRED WOMAN
I won't live to report this...

CUT TO: Mal and Simon's perspective. They're out of the hover-car and moving toward River—who stands alone (no sandy-haired woman in sight)—Simon rushing, Mal holding back with a little more caution.

SIMON
River? River are you okay?

MAL
Steady, Doc...

RIVER
People have to know.

CUT TO: River's perspective.

The two women watch the dark figures get closer. Simultaneously:

RIVER
We meant it for the best...
to make people safer... to...

SANDY-HAIRED WOMAN
We meant it for the best...
to make people safer... to...

FLASHES of abused faces, sharpened teeth, wild eyes. The Reavers SHRIEK with fury.

RIVER (cont'd)
Oh God!

SANDY-HAIRED WOMAN (cont'd)
Oh God!

River raises her pistol towards the approaching Reavers.

CUT TO: Mal and Simon's perspective.

River points the gun at Simon.

SIMON
River, n—

River FIRES.

EXT. MIRANDA – STREETS – SAME TIME

Zoe, Wash, Inara, Jayne, and Kaylee hear the GUNSHOT—not too far away. They all stop and look at each other.

ZOE
Move!

They move at a quicker pace towards the sound.

EXT. MIRANDA – MULE CRASH SITE – SAME TIME

Mal pushes Simon out of the way, knocking him to the pavement, as he dives toward River who—

—quickly puts the pistol to the side of her head.

Mal surges into River and they tumble in a heap. The gun FIRES.

SIMON
River! River!

Simon sees the pistol on the pavement near Mal and River.

Not wasting the time to stand, he rushes forward on all fours, knocking the weapon away from them all as he moves closer to his sister.

Mal has rolled away from her, and she's lying flat on her back, eyes open and staring. No blood.

Simon takes her head in his hands.

SIMON (cont'd)
(weeping)
River! It's me! It's Simon!

River's eyes clear and she begins to cry, too.

Mal stands up, brushing himself off, scanning the area.

MAL
Better dope her, Doc, 'fore she—

Mal's eyes go wide as he looks in the direction River was traveling.

MAL (cont'd)
<Oh my God>...

EXT. MIRANDA – HIGHWAY – LATER

The others run at a quick pace down the highway, moving around a few scattered, abandoned vehicles. Zoe is in the lead; Jayne helps Kaylee, who looks winded.

ZOE
There!

She points up, to a slight rise in the road.

At the top: the crashed mule, Simon comforting a crying River on the ground, and Mal looking toward the horizon, his back to them.

KAYLEE
(coughing)
Simon!

Simon looks up.

SIMON
I'm okay. She's okay...

Zoe checks the area, sweeping her gun from side to side, confirming that it's safe. Jayne continues to cover their back, in the direction the Reaver ship landed. It is general chaos as the crew sees that everyone is okay.

Zoe stands at Mal's side, looking at him as he stares.

ZOE

Sir?

Mal doesn't answer. Zoe follows his gaze and stops.

Wash checks his device, following the beacon, and looks in the same direction.

Then it's Inara whose mouth drops. Jayne, eyes on the sky with Vera, turns, looks, turns back, and double-takes.

JAYNE

<Holy mixed-berry manure>...

Simon continues to comfort his sister, looking up to see everyone staring at the horizon.

SIMON

What is it?

Finally Simon stands to look.

PULL BACK: The highway leading toward the central city is packed with VEHICLES, all in orderly lines, stopped, stretching to the horizon.

THOUSANDS and THOUSANDS of cars, not crashed—not just on the highway but on adjacent streets—all stopped.

BACK TO: The crew, who now look side to side, seeing CORPSES inside the cars at the crash site, like the ones that had been in the hover-car. Just sitting there.

KAYLEE

(very upset)

What are they doing? What's everybody doing?

SIMON

It looks like...

INARA

They just stopped....

They all stand staring, stunned by the enormity of it.

Then River screams.

She's in the middle of the street, keening, on her knees, clutching her head.

RIVER

<Merciful God please take me away>, make them stop, they're everywhere, every city every house every room, they're all inside me, I can hear them all and they're saying NOTHING! GET UP! PLEASE GET THEM UP! <I will close my eyes and heart and I will be a stone>, please god, make me a stone...

Jayne hefts his gun.

JAYNE

She's starting to damage my calm...

ZOE

Jayne—

He points down at the highway, filled with countless dead vehicles.

JAYNE

She's right! Everybody's dead! This whole world is dead for no reason!

No one can argue with that.

For a long beat, no one tries.

Then Wash holds up his scanner.

WASH

Let's go to the beacon.

EXT. MIRANDA – SIDESTREET – LATER

Wash leans over the guardrail, device in hand, tracking the beacon.

A SMALL WHITE SHUTTLE, tipped and damaged, sits at the end of a small sidestreet off the edge of the highway. The pavement is scorched and scraped leading to the vehicle.

The gang makes their way towards it.

INT. SHUTTLE – MOMENTS LATER

It's a mess, doors pried open, signs of violence but no bodies. They walk through it, looking around.

River pulls away from Simon, suddenly determined.

She approaches a console, and a CYLINDRICAL OBJECT about the size of a can of tennis balls. She turns it slightly—

It GLOWS BLUE. A hologram squawks to life amidst them all. They start, moving out of it, to watch. DOCTOR CARON – the sandy-haired woman River’s seen throughout the episode – is standing exactly where she was, leaving her message...

As she speaks, we see angles of everyone watching, taking it in. River silently mouths every word.

DR. CARON

...just a few of the images we recorded. As you can see it isn’t... it isn’t what we thought. There’s been no war here, and no terraforming event. The environment is stable. It’s the Pax. The G-32 Paxilon Hydrochlorate that we added to the air processors. It’s...

(tearing up)

...well, it works... it was supposed to calm the population, weed out aggression. Make a peaceful... it worked. The people here stopped fighting. And then they stopped everything else. They stopped going to work, stopped breeding... talking... eating...

(trying for control)

There’s thirty million people here, and they all just let themselves die. They didn’t even kill themselves. They just... most starved. When they stopped working the power grids, there were overloads, fires – the people burned to death sitting in their chairs. Just sitting.

There is a loud METALLIC BANG somewhere behind her – she starts to gather herself.

DR. CARON

I have to be quick. We can’t leave. We can’t take any of the local transports because...

A series of bangs now.

DR. CARON

There are people... they aren’t people... about a tenth of a percent of the population had the opposite reaction to the Pax. Their aggression response increased... beyond madness... they’ve killed most of us... not just killed... they’ve done... things...

WASH
(realizing, quietly)
Reavers... they made them...

DR. CARON
I won't live to report this, and we haven't got power to...
people have to know...
(loses it here)
...We meant it for the best... to make people safer... to...
God!

She whirls, grabs a gun and fires, and then aims the gun at her own head—the same motions River performed at the mule crash site— but a Reaver is on her, knocks the gun away, bites her face—

She SCREAMS continuously as the Reaver tops her, biting and tearing at her clothes, at her skin...

JAYNE
(quietly)
Turn it off...

Wash does. Nobody says anything.



EXT. SHUTTLE – DAY

Mal bursts out of the doors.

He takes a few unsteady steps away from the vessel. Inara appears behind him, follows – he holds a hand out behind him, seemingly to make her stop, but then he grabs her shoulder, holds her for support. She puts her hand over his.

MAL
I seen so much death... I been in fields carpeted with
bodies, friends and enemies – I seen men and women
blown into messes no further from me than you.

INARA
Mal...

MAL
But every single one of those people died on their feet.
Fighting. Or hell, running – doing summat to get through.
This is...

INARA

Mal, I need your help with this. I need you to walk me through this, because I can't–

He looks at her, folds her into his arms. He holds her, looking out at nothing.

INT. SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

River falls on her knees, vomiting. Simon goes to her, puts his hand on her back, lets her ride it out.

SIMON

River...

RIVER

I'm all right.

She looks at him, wet eyes full of clarity.

RIVER (cont'd)

I'm all right.

EXT. SERENITY – LATER – ESTABLISHING

Serenity sits where we left her. The too-bright sun shines down on the red Reaverized hull, glaring on it and causing pretty reflections.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

Jayne and Kaylee work the winches to raise the wrecked mule. Finally lifted into place, the cargo bay is silent. Kaylee looks up at the mule.

KAYLEE

Poor baby... Come all this way just to...

(beat)

It could have been me.

Jayne looks confused. Before he can question her–

KAYLEE

My daddy's shop, it... it always kept us eatin', but only barely sometimes, so when Poppa heard that they were lookin' for workers he...

(shudders)

I coulda been a Reaver, Jayne.

Jayne just shakes his head.

JAYNE

Don't talk nonsense.

KAYLEE

It ain't nonsense. I coulda –

JAYNE

Kaylee, you ain't gotta drop of unkindness runnin' in you. You're sweet and cheerful and... and ain't no power in the 'Verse could make you a Reaver.

Kaylee takes this in. For a moment, she seems comforted, then–

KAYLEE

So I woulda died, then. Like one of them bodies. Just... lay down.

JAYNE

Better 'n bein' a Reaver.

KAYLEE

Jayne! There's millions of people out there–

JAYNE

They died, Kaylee, but they got the better end of the stick. Now, I ain't claimin' to be a good man. Heck, I'm a killer when you get right down to it but – but I ain't no Reaver. I'd put a bullet through my own head 'fore it came to that. Or yours. Or any of ours. Even the doc.

(small smile)

'specially the doc.

(serious again)

Reavers ain't men, they...

KAYLEE

They were men. And women, and...

JAYNE

Best not to think on it. It is what it is, and lettin' those hamsters run too fast on the wheel in your head'll only make it hurt somethin' fierce.

(out of nowhere)

Wanna spot me?

KAYLEE

Spot you?

JAYNE

Yeah.

(he points to the bench press)

Shepherd used to do it, but...

They both look to Book's body, laying on the floor.

KAYLEE

I don't know. Don't think I could even lift the bar.

JAYNE

Sure you can. 'Verse is a lot simpler on the bench. C'mon, I'll spot you first.

Before she can answer his hand is on her shoulder, guiding her towards the bench press.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – SAME TIME

Inara putters in the corner, brewing tea. Simon sits at the table, watching River. His sister sits on the counter, holding a playback DEVICE that's hotwired to the recorder cylinder. River stares at a tiny screen, but the audio carries through the room.

CARON (Recording)

There are people... they aren't people... about a tenth of a percent of the population had the opposite reaction to the Pax. Their aggression response increased... beyond madness... they've killed most of us... not just killed... they've—

She snaps it off and looks up as Mal enters the room.

MAL

(to Simon)

How is she?

Simon opens his mouth but—

RIVER

I'm all right.

River smiles. It is pleasant. Not creepy in the slightest. Looks like she's telling the truth.

MAL

(still to Simon)

Finally gave her a dose of delcium, I see.

Simon opens his mouth but—

RIVER

No, he didn't. I don't need it.

MAL

(now to River)

No? Well, I guess that's good.

RIVER

Oh, good. You do realize I'm right here. I thought maybe you were going crazy.

Mal looks at Simon. Simon shrugs; looks like he doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Mal walks across the silent room, closer to River and Inara until he's standing right in front of River.

MAL

Well...

(beat)

You just get some rest, little albatross.

He starts to leave through the foredeck hall, but Inara gently intercepts him, putting a steaming mug of tea in his hands. He nods gratefully and starts to move on again.

RIVER

Mal?

He turns around.

RIVER

Don't lie down, Captain.

Mal stops.

RIVER (cont'd)

Don't ever lie down again.

MAL

I won't.

Mal leaves.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash sits in the pilot's chair, Zoe behind him with her hands on his shoulders. Ben's in the co-pilot's chair.

BEN

And... it's clean. Again. No sign of any Reavers in orbit since the one left thirty minutes ago.

ZOE

Run it again.

WASH

That's the third sweep, sweetness.

ZOE

Run it anyway. Reaver ships comin' down to dump bodies and refuel... I wanna know when another one shows up.

BEN

They dumped their bodies?

(considers this)

Huh. Well I guess it makes sense.

They look at him quizzically.

WASH

Because everybody ties corpses to their ships and drops them right before juicing up the fuel lines.

BEN

I'm just saying, this place could be sacred to them... you know, like the remains of Earth-that-Was are to us... They were born here... reborn, I guess... amidst all this death.

WASH

Born-again Reavers? I kinda doubt that man-eating, skin-sewing killers come down here like going to church on Sunday.

BEN

Well, no, but... they was people. Before. And people... even Jayne believes in God...

ZOE

You don't.

BEN

Could be a god. Might not be one. I believe in science.
(shakes his head)
But that don't matter. I'm not saying that their beliefs are
ritualized, but... but everyone believes in something right?

Everyone considers this.

WASH

Not sure that Mal does.

BEN

Sure he does.

ZOE

Ain't sung a hymn in seven years.

BEN

But he believes in you. He believes in his crew.

He's right, on some level, and they all know it. Zoe shakes her head. She can't deal with this right now. She kisses Wash on the head, hunkers down, hugs him from behind.

WASH

Don't mind her, she's just... unsettled. We all are.
(beat)
I think you're right. I think every man has to believe in
something.

Behind him, out of focus, mug in his hand, Mal steps onto the bridge.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – LATER

Mal, standing at the head of the table, comes into focus. Gone is the mug; in its place, the cylinder.

Brilliant light pours into the room from the windows above as Mal sets the cylinder on the table and looks at his crew.

MAL

Near as we can figure, this report is maybe twelve years old. Parliament buried it, and it stayed buried til River dug it up. This is what they feared she knew. And they were right to fear, 'cause there's a universe of folk that are gonna know it too.

Mal touches the cylinder.

MAL (cont'd)

They're gonna see it. Somebody has to speak for these people.

He pauses. Everyone waits.

MAL (cont'd)

You all got on this boat for different reasons, but y'all come to the same place. So now I'm asking more of you than I have before. Maybe all. 'Cause as sure as I know anything I know this: They will try it again. Maybe on another world, maybe on this very ground swept clean. A year from now, ten, they'll swing back to the belief that they can make people...

(looks at River)

...better. And I do not hold to that. So no more running.

He eyes them all.

MAL (cont'd)

I aim to misbehave.

A beat as it sinks in. Then Jayne leans forward.

JAYNE

Shepherd Book always told me: if you can't do something good, do something right.

By way of emphasis, he takes a sip of Blue Sun Whiskey and slides the glass across the table to Simon. Simon takes his sip.

SIMON

Do we have a plan?

MAL

Mr. Universe. We haven't the equipment to Wave this code to him, much less broadcast it, but he can put it on every screen for thirty worlds. He's pretty damn close, too.

RIVER

Based on our orbital trajectories, he'll reach optimum proximity just before our sunset. If we make a direct run at full burn, we can reach him inside of four hours.

She doesn't notice the reactions to her sudden clarity – she's still somewhat in her own world.

WASH

Still got the Reavers, and probably the Alliance between us and him.

ZOE

It's a fair bet the Alliance knows about Mr. Universe. They're gonna see this coming.

Mal looks at her.

MAL

No.

He takes a long moment, his jaw tightening imperceptibly.

MAL

They're not gonna see **this** coming.

BLACKOUT